

ADAMS BUILDING
517-527 West Bay Street
Jacksonville
Duval County
Florida

HABS NO. FL-341

HABS
FLA,
16-JACK,
4-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DOCUMENTATION

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HABS
FLA,
16-JACK,
4-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. 341-FL-341

ADAMS BUILDING

Location: 517-527 West Bay Street, Duval County, Jacksonville, Florida.

USGS Jacksonville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.436060. 3355060.

Present Owner: Peter Lesnick, 1367 Riverbirch Lane, Jacksonville, Fla.

Present Occupant: Pete's Pawn Shop, Mama's Discount Center, Bluebird Grill.

Present Use: Transient hotel (upper floor), commercial (lower floor).

Significance: Representative of Jacksonville commercial design at the turn of the century, the Adams Building was one of a very few such structures (and probably the only downtown hotel) to survive the 1901 fire. Built c. 1895, the building features decorative brickwork, exposed iron structural members, and skylighted lobby.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The structure first appears on the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1897; a stone over the main entry bears the date 1895.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building lies on the parcel recorded and described as lot 2, Block 97 of Harts' LaVilla map, in the Harts' LaVilla plat and deed books at The Title and Trust Co. of Fla., 200 East Forsyth Street, Jacksonville, as follows:
 - 1891 Warranty Deed, April 10, 1891, recorded April 15, 1891, in BXL79; passed from Manuel Jordon
to
John Rollins, for self, and J. C. Greeley and H. Morgan.
 - 1895 Warranty Deed, April 20, 1895, recorded May 29, 1895, in 30631; passed from John Rollin, et al.
to
Florida Finance Co.

- 1918 Warranty Deed, March 27, 1918, recorded May 18, in liber 171 folio 214; passed from Charles E. Smith for Smith Richardson Investment Co.
to
Harry Finkelstein and Charles Starobmetz
- 1919 Warranty Deed, May 30, 1919, recorded July 5, 1913, in Liber 184 folio 598; passed from Harry Fikelstein
to
James F. Horner
- 1920 Warranty Deed, February 16, 1920, recorded February 10, 1921, in liber 209 folio 78; passed from James F. Horner and wife
to
Wilson Dry Goods Co.
- 1925 Warranty Deed, August 6, 1925, recorded August 19, 1925, in liber 286 folio 411; passed from Wilson Dry Goods
to
Moses Feldman
- 1937 Warranty Deed, March, 1937, recorded August 26, 1937, in liber 764 folio 24; passed from Ida Feldman, et al
to
Blanche R. Bransford
- 1955 Warranty Deed, August 16, 1955, recorded August 16, 1955, in liber 1756 folio 31; passed from L. E. Bransford and wife
to
L. E. Bransford, Jr. and wife
- 1962 Warranty Deed, December 28, 1962, recorded December 31, 1962, in liber 1772 folio 68; passed from L. E. Bransford Jr. and wife
to
L. E. Bransford and wife
- 1968 Warranty Deed, February 27, 1968, recorded February 27, 1968, in liber 2835 folio 22; passed from L. E. Bransford
to
Peter Lesnick
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: There are no available construction records available for this building.
5. Alterations and additions: There do not appear to have been any major alterations. The clerk's desk in the center hall of the second floor hotel has been shortened; several rooms on the north elevation appear to have been partitioned within the last ten years. The present owner has made no alterations (Lesnick interview).

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure.

LaVilla Section of Bay Street in the late Nineteenth Century:
The Adams Building lies just west of Clay Street, technically placing it in the LaVilla section of the city. It has always contained a hotel on the second floor. The Sanborn Maps list it as the Prospect House from 1897-1903, and as the Hotel Moncrief in 1913. The 1913 map is the first one to denote the uses of the first floor shops; one is listed as a wholesale liquor store and another as a saloon.

It appears that the building was not erected in the most savory of neighborhoods in 1895. Newspaper articles in 1887 painted a less than wholesome picture of the area, as Richard Martin in The City Makers relates:

The temperance movement came to a head as a series of scandals erupted in LaVilla in which the little town's mayor, J.E.T. Bowden, fought an outrageously corrupt City Council, personally raided houses of prostitution, and tried to close, single-handed, one of the most notorious bistros along the LaVilla section of Bay Street. In this latter case, Bowden was knocking heads with Colonel Sam Houston, said to be one of the liquor ring bosses and owner of a garish saloon known popularly as "The Store". Much to his despair, Bowden could do nothing without the cooperation of his alderman, and refused to take any action even after three murders were committed in the vicinity of Houston's dive in as many months. (Martin, p. 187).

In the mid-twentieth century the hotel was "used as a cheap house of prostitution" and there were reputedly "peep holes" in the walls of each room (Starrett interview).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

- (a) Sanborn Maps, 1891-1949: These are in the map room of Library East, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.
- (b) Deed Books: These are contained in the offices of The Title and Trust Co. of Florida, 200 East Forsyth Street, Jacksonville.
- (c) Interviews:

Peter Lesnick, present owner, Pete's Pawn Shop, 519 West Bay Street, Jacksonville, 8/11/75; concerning history of building and alterations done to it.

Robert Starrett, former head of City Police Vice Squad, Office of the Director of Safety and Security, Jacksonville Port Authority, 2701 Talleyrand Avenue, Jacksonville, 7/1/75; concerning prostitution in the Adams Building Hotel.

2. Secondary sources:

Martin, Richard A. The City Makers. Convention Press, 1972.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Representative of Jacksonville's commercial buildings at the turn of the century, this structure exhibits Romanesque revival overtones, exposed decorative structural iron, and skylighted second floor lobby.
2. Condition of fabric: Apparently sound, but deteriorating and poorly maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular, 101'-6" by 83'-8", 13 bays, two stories; westside cants to conform to Broad Street angle.
2. Wall construction, finish and color: Red brick walls with dentil corbelling at cornice and at contrasting belt courses.
3. Structural system, framing: Iron I-beam lintel evident over shop fronts; iron tie rods are embellished with rosettes. Iron fluted pilasters divide shop fronts.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Narrow articulated central entry in pavillion form, street door gives access to second floor. Central parapet flanked each side with six compound semi-circular arches (seven corbelled extrado courses). Adjacent arches intersect above common imposts.
 - b. Windows: Modern double hung sash. Lower level: plate glass store fronts (modern).
5. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Parapet.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Decorative brick corbelling at cornice line. Pavillion form elevated center parapet (with dentil cornice, metal plate reading "Adams" in frieze, brick architrave course) supported by pair of triple engaged columns (with rusticated caps, springing from imposts supported by pair of triple engaged columns (with rusticated caps, springing from imposts with conical pendants) flanking flat headed window with metal plate above depicting the date "1895".

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: Central entry stair to upper (hotel) floor; stair opens onto lobby with skylight and reception desk. To the left of the lobby is desk, office and maintenance core surrounded by halls and rooms on the outerperimeter. To the right (east) of the lobby is the plumbing/bath/toilet core surrounded by halls and rooms on the outer perimeter.

Lower floor is occupied by shops with store fronts on the Bay Street facade.

2. Stairways: Central stair from street side to second floor. Rear fire escape.
3. Ceramic tile mosaic letters "Adams" in vestibule at stair leading to upper floor. Otherwise elsewhere - wooden, asphalt tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster (now painted black in upper floor).
5. Doorways and doors: Wooden paneled.
6. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Spindle corner protectors.
7. Notable hardware: A few decorative brass escutcheons, knobs remain.
8. Mechanical equipment: Some old lavatory fixtures in bath/toilet core.

D. Site:

1. Decayed commercial area. Gap (removed building) to west leaves lot empty to Broad Street corner. Adjacent building at 501-513 Bay is El Modelo Building. Oriented sout, 190 degrees.

Prepared by: Carolyn J. Hamm
Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Jacksonville, Florida
August, 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Florida Bicentennial Commission and the Jacksonville Historical and Cultural Conservation Commission, under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, at the HABS Field Office, Riverside, Jacksonville, Florida, by Susan Tate (University of Florida), project supervisor; Frederick Wiedenmann (University of Florida), architect; Carolyn Hamm (Cornell University), project historian; and student assistant architects Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Ruthie Wiley (Mississippi State University), and Robert Wiltse (Louisiana State University).

ADDENDUM TO:
ADAMS BUILDING
517-527 West Bay Street
Jacksonville
Duval County
Florida

HABS FL-341
FLA, 16-JACK, 4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001